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GUZ 17 Esther

*Bible Commentary:
David Guzik TEV - XVII*

David Guzik

David Guziks' Commentary On
17 Esther
Biblical Text – TEV (Good News Bible)

The King's Banquets

Est 1:1 (1-2) From his royal throne in Persia's capital city of Susa, King Xerxes ruled 127 provinces, all the way from India to Ethiopia.

Est 1:3 In the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his officials and administrators. The armies of Persia and Media were present, as well as the governors and noblemen of the provinces.

Est 1:4 For six whole months he made a show of the riches of the imperial court with all its splendor and majesty.

Est 1:5 After that, the king gave a banquet for all the people in the capital city of Susa, rich and poor alike. It lasted a whole week and was held in the gardens of the royal palace.

Est 1:6 The courtyard there was decorated with blue and white cotton curtains, tied by cords of fine purple linen to silver rings on marble columns. Couches made of gold and silver had been placed in the courtyard, which was paved with white marble, red feldspar, shining mother-of-pearl, and blue turquoise.

Est 1:7 Drinks were served in gold cups, no two of them alike, and the king was generous with the royal wine.

Est 1:8 There were no limits on the drinks; the king had given orders to the palace servants that everyone could have as much as they wanted.

Est 1:9 Meanwhile, inside the royal palace Queen Vashti was giving a banquet for the women.

Queen Vashti's Refusal

Est 1:10 On the seventh day of his banquet the king was drinking and feeling happy, so he called in the seven eunuchs who were his personal servants, Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas.

Est 1:11 He ordered them to bring in Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown. The queen was a beautiful woman, and the king wanted to show off her beauty to the officials and all his guests.

Est 1:12 But when the servants told Queen Vashti of the king's command, she refused to come. This made the king furious.

Est 1:13 Now it was the king's custom to ask for expert opinion on questions of law and order, so he called for his advisers, who would know what should be done.

Est 1:14 Those he most often turned to for advice were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan—seven officials of Persia and Media who held the highest offices in the kingdom.

Est 1:15 He said to these men, "I, King Xerxes, sent my servants to Queen Vashti with a command, and she refused to obey it! What does the law say that we should do with her?"

Est 1:16 Then Memucan declared to the king and his officials: "Queen Vashti has insulted not only the king but also his officials—in fact, every man in the empire!

Est 1:17 Every woman in the empire will start looking down on her husband as soon as she hears what the queen has done. They'll say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to come to him, and she refused.'

Est 1:18 When the wives of the royal officials of Persia and Media hear about the queen's behavior, they will be telling their husbands about it before the day is out. Wives everywhere will have no respect for their husbands, and husbands will be angry with their wives.

Est 1:19 If it please Your Majesty, issue a royal proclamation that Vashti may never again appear before the king. Have it written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it can never be changed. Then give her place as queen to some better woman.

Est 1:20 When your proclamation is made known all over this huge empire, every woman will treat her husband with proper respect, whether he's rich or poor."

Est 1:21 The king and his officials liked this idea, and the king did what Memucan suggested.

Est 1:22 To each of the royal provinces he sent a message in the language and the system of writing of that province, saying that every husband should be the master of his home and speak with final authority.

Esther 1:1-22

Esther 1 - A Queen Is Deposed

Esther is the last of the historical books of the Bible, so its main character is named Esther - that is, Venus, the morning star, which sheds its light after all the other stars have ceased to shine, and while the sun still delays rising. Thus, the deeds of Queen Esther cast a ray of light forward into Israel's history from a dark time.

A. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) holds a grand feast.

1. (1-2) King Ahasuerus and his domain.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

a. **It came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus:** This king **Ahasuerus** is well known to history, though more commonly under the name *Xerxes*. He inherited the vast

Persian Empire from his father, Darius I (who is mentioned in passages such as Ezr 4:24; Ezr 5:5-7; Ezr 6:1-15; Dan 6:1; Dan 6:25; Hag 1:15; Hag 2:10).

i. The fact of the existence of this king and circumstance is extremely well attested; archaeologists have discovered the ruins of the very palace where these events happened.

b. In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom: At this time (approximately 483 B.C.), Ahasuerus was planning for a doomed invasion of Greece, which would take place several years later. At this time the city of Athens was in its classical glory and in Greece they were celebrating the 79th Olympic games.

i. At this time, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever seen. It covered what we call today Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel; and also, parts of modern day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.

ii. Also at this time Ezra had returned to Jerusalem after it had been conquered by the Babylonians. The temple had been rebuilt some 30 years before, although more simply and without the glory of Solomon's temple.

iii. In 40 years, under the successor of Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes I), Nehemiah would return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the previously conquered city.

2. (3-9) Three royal feasts.

That in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants; the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him; when he showed the riches of his

glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days *in all*. And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. *There were white and blue linen curtains* fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; *and the couches were* of gold and silver on a *mosaic* pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus*.

a. He made a feast for all his officials and servants:

The first feast was for all the government officials, where Ahasuerus showed off the glory and splendor of the riches of his kingdom. This feast lasted for 180 days.

b. The king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel: The second feast was for the citizens of the capital city, Shushan and it lasted for seven days.

i. The basic reason for these feasts was, of course, pride. The king wanted to impress his subjects with a great display of his own wealth and power and majesty and generosity. This is typical of the way that *the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them*

(Mat 20:25). There is little doubt that Ahasuerus paid for this feast out of the public treasury.

c. **There were white and blue linen curtains:** In the ancient Hebrew, the white material is literally described as "white stuff." This may be evidence that Esther was written with a man's eye for decorating detail, not a woman's.

d. **In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory:** Among some of the ancients, each guest was obliged to have a drink with the current round, or else leave the party. At this second feast, the king command that each man could drink as he pleased.

e. **Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women:** The third feast was for the women in the royal palace, and was conducted by the wife of king Ahasuerus, **Queen Vashti**.

B. Queen Vashti is deposed.

1. (10-11) King Ahasuerus demands that Vashti display her beauty before the guests at the feast.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she *was* beautiful to behold.

a. **When the heart of the king was merry with wine:** The clear implication is that Ahasuerus was drunk.

b. **To bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown:** According to Jewish tradition, this request came from an argument among the men at the feast as to which country had the most beautiful women.

Ahasuerus decided to settle the issue by putting his wife the queen on public display.

c. **For she was beautiful to behold:** It is not specifically said, but the implication is that Vashti was expected to display herself in an immodest way.

2. (12) *Queen Vashti refuses to appear before the drunken guests of the feast.*

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

a. **But Queen Vashti refused to come:** Though Vashti was by no means a follower of the true God, she had enough wisdom and modesty to know that this was something she should not do.

i. The Bible says that wives have a special responsibility to submit to their husbands (*wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord; Eph 5:22*). Yet it does not mean that a wife must obey her husband if he commands her to sin. Every command to submit on a human level is conditioned by the higher obligation to obey God before man.

ii. However, it is important for a Christian in such a situation to maintain a submissive and respectful attitude towards the one in authority. It is possible to disobey the command of another but do so in a submissive manner. It is impossible to say if Queen Vashti had this attitude in this situation.

iii. Jewish traditions say that her refusal had nothing to do with modesty. These stories say that she was ready to appear before the banqueters completely unclothed, except that God smote her with leprosy just as she received the request (an obviously fanciful tradition).

b. Therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned: Queen Vashti was therefore in a very dangerous situation. It does not seem that she put herself in this situation, because it seems that she was not even at this banquet.

i. Sadly, many women today put themselves in dangerous places, especially where alcohol is involved, showing a severe lack of wisdom. Nevertheless, it certainly gives no justification to the sin of men against an unwise woman in such a situation.

ii. "What woman, possessing even a common share of prudence and modesty, could consent to expose herself to the view of such a group of drunken Bacchanalians? Her courage was equal to her modesty: she would resist the royal mandate, rather than violate the rules of chaste decorum... Hail, noble woman! be thou a pattern to all thy sex on every similar occasion!" (Clarke)

3. (13-22) The banishment of Vashti.

Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, those closest to him *being* Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, *and* who ranked highest in the kingdom): "What *shall* we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought to her* by the eunuchs?" And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their

husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and wrath. If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small." And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

a. **That Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she:** When King Ahasuerus heeded this advice from Memucan, he showed himself to be unreasonable and wrong. He should have honored the dignity of his Queen. Yet, history's profile of Ahasuerus shows him to be an unreasonable and foolish man in many cases.

i. On one occasion, Ahasuerus executed the builders of a bridge because an ocean storm destroyed it; then he commanded that the water and waves be whipped and chained to punish the sea.

b. **That each man should be master in his own house:** The purpose for the harsh treatment of Vashti was so that she would not set a bad example for the other women of Persia. Ahasuerus wanted to reinforce the idea of a man's leadership in the home.

i. They were afraid that because of Queen Vashti's example, wives would **despise their husbands...** that there would **be excessive contempt and wrath**; therefore, they wanted to ensure that **each man should be master in his own house**.

ii. The *goal* presented here was admirable and speaks to the need within every man to sense respect and honor from his wife. Paul's instruction to wives was summed up like this: *let the wife see that she respects her husband* (Eph 5:33). A wife's respect is the most precious gift she can give her husband.

iii. However, the *means* used here to gain and preserve this respect were foolish. A man cannot demand or coerce respect from his wife - if it isn't freely given, then it isn't worth anything.

Esther Chosen Queen

Est 2:1 Later, even after the king's anger had cooled down, he kept thinking about what Vashti had done and about his proclamation against her.

Est 2:2 So some of the king's advisers who were close to him suggested, "Why don't you make a search to find some beautiful young virgins?"

Est 2:3 You can appoint officials in every province of the empire and have them bring all these beautiful young women to your harem here in Susa, the capital city. Put them in the care of Hegai, the eunuch who is in charge of your women, and let them be given a beauty treatment.

Est 2:4 Then take the young woman you like best and make her queen in Vashti's place." The king thought this was good advice, so he followed it.

Est 2:5 There in Susa lived a Jew named Mordecai son of Jair; he was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei.

Est 2:6 When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jehoiachin of Judah into exile from Jerusalem, along with a group of captives, Mordecai was among them.

Est 2:7 He had a cousin, Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah; she was a beautiful young woman, and had a good figure. At the death of her parents, Mordecai had adopted her and brought her up as his own daughter.

Est 2:8 When the king had issued his new proclamation and many young women were being brought to Susa, Esther was among them. She too was put in the royal palace in the care of Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

Est 2:9 Hegai liked Esther, and she won his favor. He lost no time in beginning her beauty treatment of massage and special diet. He gave her the best place in the harem and assigned seven young women specially chosen from the royal palace to serve her.

Est 2:10 Now, on the advice of Mordecai, Esther had kept it secret that she was Jewish.

Est 2:11 Every day Mordecai would walk back and forth in front of the courtyard of the harem, in order to find out how she was getting along and what was going to happen to her.

Est 2:12 The regular beauty treatment for the women lasted a year—massages with oil of myrrh for six months and with oil of balsam for six more. After that, each woman would be taken in turn to King Xerxes.

Est 2:13 When she went from the harem to the palace, she could wear whatever she wanted.

Est 2:14 She would go there in the evening, and the next morning she would be taken to another harem and put in the care of Shaashgaz, the eunuch in charge of the king's concubines. She would not go to the king again unless he liked her enough to ask for her by name.

Est 2:15 The time came for Esther to go to the king. Esther—the daughter of Abihail and the cousin of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his daughter; Esther—admired by everyone who saw her. When her turn came, she wore just what Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem, advised her to wear.

Est 2:16 So in Xerxes' seventh year as king, in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, Esther was brought to King Xerxes in the royal palace.

Est 2:17 The king liked her more than any of the other women, and more than any of the others she won his favor and affection. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

Est 2:18 Then the king gave a great banquet in Esther's honor and invited all his officials and administrators. He proclaimed a holiday for the whole empire and distributed gifts worthy of a king.

Mordecai Discovers a Plot

Est 2:19 Meanwhile Mordecai had been appointed by the king to an administrative position.

Est 2:20 As for Esther, she had still not let it be known that she was Jewish. Mordecai had told her not to tell anyone, and she obeyed him in this, just as she had obeyed him when she was a little girl under his care.

Est 2:21 During the time that Mordecai held office in the palace, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the palace eunuchs who guarded the entrance to the king's rooms, became hostile to King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him.

Est 2:22 Mordecai learned about it and told Queen Esther, who then told the king what Mordecai had found out.

Est 2:23 There was an investigation, and it was discovered that the report was true, so both men were hanged on the gallows. The king ordered an account of this to be written down in the official records of the empire.

Esther 2:1-23

Esther 2 - Esther Is Chosen Queen

A. The gathering together of a harem for King Ahasuerus.

1. (1-4) A search is made for a replacement for Queen Vashti.

After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

a. **After these things:** This is broader than just the events of the previous chapter. Est 2:16 indicates that there was a four-year span between chapters one and two. During that time King Ahasuerus made his great, unsuccessful invasion of Greece and he came home a defeated man, wanting to cheer his heart through sensual diversions.

b. **Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king:** The plan was to assemble a harem from the most beautiful women of the land; to bring them into a harem for the king, and to choose the most favored woman to be his queen from that group. This was sort of a “Miss Persian Empire” contest, and the winner would **be queen instead of Vashti.**

c. **This thing pleased the king, and he did so:** The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says the Ahasuerus had a total of 400 women selected.

2. (5-7) *Esther and her family.*

In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. *Kish* had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And *Mordecai* had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

a. **There was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai:** Mordecai, the cousin of Esther, came to Persia in one of the waves of relocation that the Babylonians imposed on Judah when it conquered that land.

b. **And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter:** Esther (whose Jewish name **Hadassah** means “Myrtle”; the Persian name *Esther* means “star”) was raised by her cousin Mordecai since the death of her father and mother.

i. "In prophetic symbolism the myrtle would replace the briars and thorns of the desert, so depicting the Lord's forgiveness and acceptance of his people. (Isa 41:19; Isa 55:13; cf. Zec 1:8)" (Baldwin)

ii. They were part of the large Jewish community that was forced to relocate out of Judah and didn't decide to return with Ezra. In the day of Mordecai and Esther, the land of Judah was regarded as a wild and backward place.

c. **The young woman was lovely and beautiful:** The Hebrew for **lovely and beautiful** is literally, "beautiful in form and lovely to look at." Or, as the NIV has it, *lovely in form and features*.

i. We regard that the Bible is generally given to understatement; when it says that Esther was *lovely and beautiful*, we know that it isn't exaggerating.

3. (8) *Esther is taken into the king's harem.*

So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, *under* the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women.

a. **That Esther also was taken to the king's palace:** It seems that Esther didn't really have a choice about this.

b. **Into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women:** Hegai was the *king's eunuch* (Est 2:3), a man entrusted with the oversight of the king's harem for obvious reasons.

i. According to Baldwin, Hegai is specifically mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus as being an officer of king Ahasuerus.

B. Esther in the courts of the king.

1. (9) Esther's favored treatment in the palace.

Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of the women.

a. **Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor:** Esther *obtained favor* with Hegai, the man in authority over her. In this, her godliness ensured a fulfillment of Pro 3:3-4 : *Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man.*

b. **He readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance:** Because of this favor, Hegai gave Esther special beauty preparations, beyond **her allowance**. He also gave her **seven choice maidservants** to look after her beauty needs.

i. Esther was beautiful to begin with; now she looked like one of those "after" pictures from the glamour photo studios - and she looked that way all the time.

ii. The ancient Hebrew word for **beauty preparations** comes from the root "to scour, to polish." (Huey)

2. (10-11) Esther conceals her Jewish identity.

Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*. And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

a. Esther had not revealed her people or family:

Normally, there is never a good reason for hiding the fact that we are Christians. Far too many Christians act as if they are "secret agents" - and they always conceal who they are in the Lord.

i. We must take the warning Jesus gave in Mat 10:32-33 seriously: *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.* We can't live a life of denial and expect God to recognize us.

b. For Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it:

However, we do recognize that there are situations where God may have us be reticent about our Christian identity - not for the purposes of permanently concealing it, but waiting for the opportune moment to reveal it. Apparently, this is what Mordecai sensed was right to do in this circumstance, and Esther agreed.

i. For example, in some situations one might initially act as if they know nothing when approached by a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon, and do it not to deny Jesus, but to seize a strategic opportunity.

c. Every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare:

Mordecai's great interest in Esther's state shows his love and concern for her in such a potentially dangerous place.

3. (12-14) *The method of preparing and presenting the women before the king is established.*

Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the

women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus *prepared, each* young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

a. **After she had completed twelve months' preparation:** Persia was one of many countries famous for its aromatic perfumes and ancient customs for the preparations of brides, including ritualistic baths, plucking of the eyebrows, the painting of hands and feet with henna, facial make-up, and applications of a beautifying paste all over the body, meant to lighten the color of the skin and to remove spots and blemishes.

i. One reason for the lengthy time of preparation was to tell if the women had been pregnant upon coming into the harem, so that the king would not be charged with fathering a child that was not his.

ii. Matthew Poole says that the oils and perfumes were necessary because "The bodies of men and women in those hot countries did of themselves yield very ill scents, if not corrected and qualified by art."

b. **Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king:** It sounds wonderful – a year of constant spa treatments. Yet the destiny of these women should also be considered: one evening with the king. If he chose them from the 400 others to be his queen, then she would be his companion (until she displeased him). As for

the 399 who lost, they were banished to the harem where they stayed the wife or the concubine of the king, but rarely if ever saw him afterwards. And they were never free to marry another man, essentially living as a perpetual widow.

4. (15-18) *Esther is selected as queen.*

Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

a. **She requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised:** Esther's humble wisdom was shown in the way that she allowed the **custodian of the women** to assist her preparations.

b. **Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her:** This was because of *both* Esther's godliness and beauty.

i. Beauty often gains people (especially women) favor with others. This is a fact that Christians must accept, wisely teaching their children what really matters, and

refusing to rely too much on beauty for our judgment of people.

c. She obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins: Because of the great favor that she obtained with the king, Esther was selected to be the queen to king Ahasuerus.

i. Esther's life so far has been remarkable. She was the child of Jewish exiles, who both died; she was raised by her cousin in a foreign and often hostile land; she was taken by compulsion into the king's harem; she found favor with all whom she met; and she was finally selected to be the queen of the realm.

ii. This remarkable course of events wasn't an accident; it wasn't just because of luck or fortune or Esther's good looks or sparkling personality. God had a plan, and Esther is part of it. As Psa 75:6-7 says: *For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.*

iii. In *exactly* the same way, we have a place in God's plan. Wherever you are at right now, God has a purpose for it - maybe a short purpose, or a long one; perhaps a large purpose or a small purpose, but God has a reason.

iv. To this point, the story of Esther also shows us that in the outworking of His plan, God can use the evil of man. God did not make Ahasuerus drunk, or make him demand that his queen present herself in an immodest way before the lords of the kingdom; yet God allowed this wicked action of man to fulfill a purpose in His greater plan. We find assurance in the truth that no other person, no matter how evil they are, can defeat God's plan for our life, no matter what they have done to you or will do to you.

C. Mordecai saves the king's life.

1. (19-20) Mordecai's rise in prominence and Esther continues to conceal her Jewish identity.

When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

a. **Mordecai sat within the king's gate:** This position indicates that Mordecai was associated with the decision makers and men of influence in the kingdom.

b. **Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her:** Some have thought that the book of Esther carries this idea of concealment too far. This book has been criticized because it does not mention the name of God (as neither does the Song of Solomon).

i. Some say that the name of God was left out of the book of Esther because of its use in the festivities surrounding Purim, where people commonly became drunk. One rabbi taught: "A man is obligated to drink on Purim until he is unable to distinguish between 'Blessed be Mordecai' and 'Cursed be Haman.'" Some have wondered if, in that atmosphere, it would be too easy to profane the name of God if it were to be read at such a festival.

ii. Others see the name YHWH hidden in acrostics, based on the initial and final letters of successive words in Est 1:20; Est 5:4; Est 5:13; Est 7:7. In some manuscripts, the letters in these words are written a bit larger to give them prominence.

iii. Perhaps also the book of Esther does not contain the name of God because it was written under Persian rule, and for distribution in the Persian Empire.

iv. Most likely, the book of Esther doesn't have the name of God because it shows how God works *behind* the scenes; God is always active in Esther, even though it is behind the scenes.

2. (21-23) *Mordecai hears an assassination conspiracy and informs the king, saving the king's life.*

In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

a. **The matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king:** Mordecai's attitude wasn't "I'm a Jewish man in exile under a pagan king, so I do not care if he is killed." Instead, he fulfilled Peter's thought in 1Pe 2:17, before Peter ever wrote it: *Fear God. Honor the king.*

i. This threat of assassination was real. Ahasuerus was eventually murdered by his prime minister, who placed Artaxerxes I on the throne.

b. **Both were hanged on a gallows:** The word **gallows** is literally *tree*; the idea that they were *hanged on a tree* probably refers not to a hanging with a noose around the neck, but to impalement on a stake, much like crucifixion.

i. "A pointed stake is set upright in the ground, and the culprit is taken, placed on the sharp point, and then pulled down by his legs till the stake that went in at the fundament passes up through the body and comes out through the neck. A most dreadful species of punishment, in which revenge and cruelty may glut the utmost of their malice. The culprit lives a considerable time in excruciating agonies." (Clarke)

Haman Plots Against the Jews

Est 3:1 Some time later King Xerxes promoted a man named Haman to the position of prime minister. Haman was the son of Hammedatha, a descendant of Agag.

Est 3:2 The king ordered all the officials in his service to show their respect for Haman by kneeling and bowing to him. They all did so, except for Mordecai, who refused to do it.

Est 3:3 The other officials in the royal service asked him why he was disobeying the king's command;

Est 3:4 day after day they urged him to give in, but he would not listen to them. "I am a Jew," he explained, "and I cannot bow to Haman." So they told Haman about this, wondering if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct.

Est 3:5 Haman was furious when he realized that Mordecai was not going to kneel and bow to him,

Est 3:6 and when he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to do more than punish Mordecai alone. He made plans to kill every Jew in the whole Persian Empire.

Est 3:7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes' rule, in the first month, the month of Nisan, Haman ordered the lots to be cast ("purim," they were called) to find out the right day and month to carry out his plot. The thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, was decided on.

Est 3:8 So Haman told the king, "There is a certain race of people scattered all over your empire and found in every

province. They observe customs that are not like those of any other people. Moreover, they do not obey the laws of the empire, so it is not in your best interests to tolerate them.

Est 3:9 If it please Your Majesty, issue a decree that they are to be put to death. If you do, I guarantee that I will be able to put 375 tons of silver into the royal treasury for the administration of the empire."

Est 3:10 The king took off his ring, which was used to stamp proclamations and make them official, and gave it to the enemy of the Jewish people, Haman son of Hammedatha, the descendant of Agag.

Est 3:11 The king told him, "The people and their money are yours; do as you like with them."

Est 3:12 So on the thirteenth day of the first month Haman called the king's secretaries and dictated a proclamation to be translated into every language and system of writing used in the empire and to be sent to all the rulers, governors, and officials. It was issued in the name of King Xerxes and stamped with his ring.

Est 3:13 Runners took this proclamation to every province of the empire. It contained the instructions that on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, all Jews—young and old, women and children—were to be killed. They were to be slaughtered without mercy and their belongings were to be taken.

Est 3:14 The contents of the proclamation were to be made public in every province, so that everyone would be prepared when that day came.

Est 3:15 At the king's command the decree was made public in the capital city of Susa, and runners carried the news to the provinces. The king and Haman sat down and had a drink while the city of Susa was being thrown into confusion.

Esther 3:1-15

Esther 3 - Haman's Conspiracy

A. Haman determines to destroy the Jews.

1. (1) *Haman's promotion.*

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

a. **King Ahasuerus promoted Haman:** Haman was an ungodly man, but God had a purpose in allowing him to be promoted.

b. **Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite:** Haman was a descendant of Agag, who was the king of the Amalekites, the people who were Israel's sworn enemy for generations (Exo 17:14-16).

2. (2-3) *Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman or to pay him homage.*

And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

a. **Mordecai would not bow or pay homage:** There does not seem to be a Biblical command against bowing or paying homage to a political leader as a sign of respect (Gen 18:2; Gen 23:7; Gen 43:26; Exo 18:7; 2Sa 16:4). Rather, Mordecai must know something about this man Haman, which persuades him that Haman is unworthy of such honor - perhaps simply his ancestry.

i. "No self-respecting Benjaminite would bow before a descendant of the ancient Amalekite enemy of the Jews." (Huey)

b. **Why do you transgress the king's command?** We do not read of a specific command from King Ahasuerus that all had to bow before Haman. Perhaps the command was implied in the promotion he received (Est 3:1).

3. (4-6) *The wounded pride of Haman drives him to seek retribution against not only Mordecai and his people - the Jews.*

Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus; the people of Mordecai.

a. **It happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman:** Apparently, Haman did not first notice Haman's stubborn resistance. It had to be pointed out to him by his aides.

b. **Haman was filled with wrath:** Haman was an extremely proud and insecure man; he could only consider himself a success if *everyone* else thought he was a success.

c. **Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom:** Haman's anger led him to take out his wrath upon **all the Jews** in the

kingdom. The problem with Haman exposed his basic hatred for all Jewish people.

4. (7) *Haman determines the exact date he will strike out against the Jews.*

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

a. **The cast Pur:** This was the Persian word for **the lot**, something like dice, used to leave a decision to chance – or to the God who guides every chance.

b. **Until it fell on the twelfth month:** Since this took place **in the first month**, the casting of the lot determined that the Jews would not be attacked and massacred for at least 11 months.

i. This proves the truth of Pro 16:33 : *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.* The long delay between the first month and the month of massacre against the Jewish people was ordained by God.

B. Haman tells his plot to the king.

1. (8-9) *Haman's proposal to king Ahasuerus.*

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

a. **Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus:** Haman's charge was the most dangerous possible; it was a half-truth. Yes, the Jews were a **certain people scattered and dispersed**; and yes, they had their own **laws**. But their own laws, to this point, did not prevent them from keeping the king's laws as loyal subjects.

i. In fact, Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was *not* based on the law of God, but on the principle of personal integrity. It seems that Haman was almost completely unfamiliar with this principle of personal integrity.

b. **Let a decree be written that they be destroyed:** Haman suggested organizing the mass murder of the Jewish people. Haman also neglected to tell king Ahasuerus how many of these **certain people** there were in his kingdom; Ahasuerus probably considered this a relatively small threat.

c. **I will pay ten thousand talents of silver:** This was essentially the promise of a bribe. This money would not come from Haman's own pocket; it would be obtained from the property of slaughtered Jews.

2. (10-11) *The king agrees to the plan.*

So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you."

a. **The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you:** Again, king Ahasuerus probably had no idea what he agreed to; he probably believed that he merely agreed to the execution of a handful of dangerous revolutionaries in his kingdom.

3. (12-15) *The decree is published.*

Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and *a decree* was written according to all that Haman commanded; to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring. And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth *month*, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

a. **To destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day:** With this, an empire-wide death sentence on the Jews was announced by the king. This was like other attacks against the Jewish people in history, except that it was announced well in advance.

b. **So the king and Haman sat down to drink:** When the king **sat down to drink**, he thought he had done well – but he did not really understand what he had done. Haman also **sat down to drink** and thought he had done well – and he knew exactly what he intended to do. Despite this, **the city of Shushan was perplexed.**

i. The citizens of the empire knew Jewish people who lived among them, and they knew that they were good citizens who caused no trouble. Therefore, they were confused that such a decree came forth, declaring that these Jews were dangerous enemies.

ii. Again, all this came to pass because of the insecurity and wounded pride of one wicked man - Haman.

Esther Agrees to Help the Jews

Est 4:1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes in anguish. Then he dressed in sackcloth, covered his head with ashes, and walked through the city, wailing loudly and bitterly,

Est 4:2 until he came to the entrance of the palace. He did not go in because no one wearing sackcloth was allowed inside.

Est 4:3 Throughout all the provinces, wherever the king's proclamation was made known, there was loud mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, wailed, and most of them put on sackcloth and lay in ashes.

Est 4:4 When Esther's servant women and eunuchs told her what Mordecai was doing, she was deeply disturbed. She sent Mordecai some clothes to put on instead of the sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Est 4:5 Then she called Hathach, one of the palace eunuchs appointed as her servant by the king, and told him to go to Mordecai and find out what was happening and why.

Est 4:6 Hathach went to Mordecai in the city square at the entrance of the palace.

Est 4:7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him and just how much money Haman had promised to put into the royal treasury if all the Jews were killed.

Est 4:8 He gave Hathach a copy of the proclamation that had been issued in Susa, ordering the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai asked him to take it to Esther, explain the situation to her, and have her go and plead with the king and beg him to have mercy on her people.

Est 4:9 Hathach did this,

Est 4:10 and Esther gave him this message to take back to Mordecai:

Est 4:11 "If anyone, man or woman, goes to the inner courtyard and sees the king without being summoned, that person must die. That is the law; everyone, from the king's advisers to the people in the provinces, knows that. There is only one way to get around this law: if the king holds out his gold scepter to someone, then that person's life is spared. But it has been a month since the king sent for me."

Est 4:12 When Mordecai received Esther's message,

Est 4:13 he sent her this warning: "Don't imagine that you are safer than any other Jew just because you are in the royal palace.

Est 4:14 If you keep quiet at a time like this, help will come from heaven to the Jews, and they will be saved, but you will die and your father's family will come to an end. Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen!"

Est 4:15 Esther sent Mordecai this reply:

Est 4:16 "Go and get all the Jews in Susa together; hold a fast and pray for me. Don't eat or drink anything for three days and nights. My servant women and I will be doing the same. After that, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. If I must die for doing it, I will die."

Est 4:17 Mordecai then left and did everything that Esther had told him to do.

Esther 4:1-17

Esther 4 - Esther's Decision

A. Mordecai's mourning.

1. (1-3) *He and the rest of the Jews lament their fate.*

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

a. **He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes:** Though Mordecai was anguished at all this, we remember also that his integrity was the cause of it. He **cried out with a loud and bitter cry**, but he would not change his mind grovel at the feet of Haman to save himself or his people.

i. This was not only because of the personal integrity of Mordecai, but also because he knew the character of the laws of the Persians - that they could not be changed once decreed (Est 1:19).

b. **There was great mourning among the Jews:** Mordecai's reaction was imitated all over the Persian Empire in public expressions of grief and horror.

2. (4-7) *Mordecai explains the problem to Esther.*

So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*. Then

Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this *was*. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

a. Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her: Esther, living in the isolation of the palace, had not yet been made aware of this decree. Before she understood the decree, she could not understand why her cousin Mordecai made such a spectacle of himself.

b. And the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews: Mordecai was well aware of the money motive that made king Ahasuerus receptive to this evil plan.

B. Mordecai's request.

1. (8-12) His first request and Esther's appeal to him in response.

He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I

myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.” So they told Mordecai Esther’s words.

a. **That he might show it to Esther and explain it to her:** After giving a copy of the decree to Esther through a courier, Mordecai challenged her to intercede on behalf of her people before the king.

b. **Any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death:** Esther explained the difficulty behind this - she was only allowed to come to the king when called, and if she came on her own, she could be executed for daring to approach the king without an invitation.

i. Apparently, the life of a queen of Persia was not one of great intimacy with the king. Esther said, **“I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days”** – meaning she had not seen her husband for an entire month.

2. (13-14) Mordecai’s second request.

And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

a. **Do not think in your heart that you will escape:** Mordecai reminded Esther that she could not remain insulated from this decree any more than anyone else.

b. **If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place:** Mordecai’s trust was in the faithfulness

of God, not in the faithfulness of Esther. He knows that God will not let His people down, even if individuals let God down.

c. **But you and your father's house will perish:** Mordecai reminded Esther that though the fate of God's people rested in God and not in her, her *own fate* depended on her own faithfulness to God.

d. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?** Mordecai knew that God had promoted this orphan in exile for a reason - and Esther must have the courage and wisdom to see that reason and fulfill it.

i. This principle applies to us also. God promotes us or puts us in a place for a reason, and we need the courage and wisdom to see that reason and to walk in it.

ii. "You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus: do not wish anything of the kind, but serve him where you are." (Spurgeon)

iii. "I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences: he will come out soon, and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter. John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife, and he will be heard of at Geneva. A young man is here this morning - I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him, starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seedlings for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord." (Spurgeon)

3. (15-17) Esther's decision.

Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

a. **Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me:** Taking the determination of the Lord, Esther decided that she would go and make a bold appearance before the king, but only if she was supported by prayer and fasting.

i. Jesus reminded us that special spiritual battles sometimes require special preparation with prayer and fasting. Regarding a stubborn case of demonic possession, He said *this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting* (Mat 17:20).

b. **And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!** Esther carried a bold attitude towards her mission. She was determined to be obedient, no matter what the cost.

i. Jesus exhorted us to have the same attitude: *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul* (Mat 10:28). Paul was also an example of this attitude: *To live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Php 1:21).

Esther Prepares a Banquet

Est 5:1 On the third day of her fast Esther put on her royal robes and went and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace, facing the throne room. The king was inside, seated on the royal throne, facing the entrance.

Est 5:2 When the king saw Queen Esther standing outside, she won his favor, and he held out to her the gold scepter. She then came up and touched the tip of it.

Est 5:3 "What is it, Queen Esther?" the king asked. "Tell me what you want, and you shall have it—even if it is half my empire."

Est 5:4 Esther replied, "If it please Your Majesty, I would like you and Haman to be my guests tonight at a banquet I am preparing for you."

Est 5:5 The king then ordered Haman to come quickly, so that they could be Esther's guests. So the king and Haman went to Esther's banquet.

Est 5:6 Over the wine the king asked her, "Tell me what you want, and you shall have it. I will grant your request, even if you ask for half my empire."

Est 5:7 Esther replied,

Est 5:8 "If Your Majesty is kind enough to grant my request, I would like you and Haman to be my guests tomorrow at another banquet that I will prepare for you. At that time I will tell you what I want."

Haman Plans to Hang Mordecai

Est 5:9 When Haman left the banquet he was happy and in a good mood. But then he saw Mordecai at the entrance of the palace, and when Mordecai did not rise or show any sign of respect as he passed, Haman was furious with him.

Est 5:10 But he controlled himself and went on home. Then he invited his friends to his house and asked his wife Zeresh to join them.

Est 5:11 He boasted to them about how rich he was, how many sons he had, how the king had promoted him to high office, and how much more important he was than any of the king's other officials.

Est 5:12 "What is more," Haman went on, "Queen Esther gave a banquet for no one but the king and me, and we are invited back tomorrow.

Est 5:13 But none of this means a thing to me as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the entrance of the palace."

Est 5:14 So his wife and all his friends suggested, "Why don't you have a gallows built, seventy-five feet tall? Tomorrow morning you can ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it, and then you can go to the banquet happy." Haman thought this was a good idea, so he had the gallows built.

Esther 5:1-14

Esther 5 - Esther's Bold Request

A. The first banquet.

1. (1-5) Esther invites both king Ahasuerus and Haman to this banquet.

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What *is* your request? It shall be given to you; up to half the kingdom!" So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him." Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he

may do as Esther has said.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

a. **Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace:** Esther showed courage in her willingness to appear before the king without being summoned by him. This took special courage because King Ahasuerus did not have a good reputation for treating his queens well.

b. **If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him:** Esther also showed tact by not blurting out her ultimate request right away. She wanted to first win the king’s confidence in her - and she wanted Haman at the banquet to ultimately expose his wickedness.

2. (6-8) Esther’s request at the first banquet.

At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!” Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”

a. **What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done:** King Ahasuerus repeated this offer to Queen Esther. It was more of a proverbial expression than a literal offer for anything up to **half of the kingdom**.

b. **Let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said:** Esther put off the request for

one more day, promising to reveal her petition at a second banquet on the next day.

i. It may be that Esther could not find the courage to present her request and used the successive banquets as a delaying tactic. "Some of us are very unaccountable, but on that woman's unaccountable silence far more was hanging than appears at first sight. Doubtless she longed to bring out her secret, but the words came not. God was in it; it was not the right time to speak, and therefore she was led to put off her disclosure. I dare say she regretted it, and wondered when she should be able to come to the point, but the Lord knew best." (Spurgeon)

B. Haman's plot against Mordecai.

1. (9-13) Haman's frustration with Mordecai.

So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

a. **He was filled with indignation against Mordecai:** Miserable Haman! Honored by both the King and Queen of Persia, the disapproval of one man makes him feel

worthless. This is an accurate description of how empty the rewards of this world are.

i. Haman's deep-seated insecurities and need to be honored by *everybody* means that he can never be happy; God meant this hunger for acceptance in each of us to be ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ - because we are *accepted in the Beloved* (Eph 1:6), accepted before God because of who we are in Jesus.

b. **Nevertheless Haman restrained himself:** This is a remarkable evidence of the hand of God. God would not allow the fury of Haman to take action until all the proper pieces were set in place to ultimately defeat his plan.

c. **Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate:** Haman's problem wasn't Mordecai, it was the emptiness in his own heart. Even if he solved the "Mordecai problem," it would not fill the emptiness in his heart.

i. "The soul was made for God, and nothing but God can fill it and make it happy." (Clarke)

2. (14) *Haman happily receives counsel to ask for Mordecai's execution the next day at the second feast.*

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet." And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

a. **Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it:** For these friends of Haman, it wasn't enough to just punish Mordecai's people (remember the genocide against the Jews is already set in motion), or

merely to kill Mordecai. They wanted Haman to ask for a public, humiliating execution of Mordecai on gallows 75 feet (25 meters) high.

i. The **gallows** mentioned here was not for *hanging* a victim, but for violently killing and displaying the victim. "A pointed stake is set upright in the ground, and the culprit is taken, placed on the sharp point, and then pulled down by his legs till the stake that went in at the fundament passes up through the body and comes out through the neck. A most dreadful species of punishment, in which revenge and cruelty may glut the utmost of their malice. The culprit lives a considerable time in excruciating agonies." (Clarke)

b. **And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made:** We should never underestimate the destructive and distorting power of hatred. The same irrational, violent hatred that made Haman want to see Mordecai hang to his death is the same irrational, violent hatred that made man want to hang Jesus on a cross.

The King Honors Mordecai

Est 6:1 That same night the king could not get to sleep, so he had the official records of the empire brought and read to him.

Est 6:2 The part they read included the account of how Mordecai had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king—the plot made by Bigthana and Teresh, the two palace eunuchs who had guarded the king's rooms.

Est 6:3 The king asked, "How have we honored and rewarded Mordecai for this?" His servants answered, "Nothing has been done for him."

Est 6:4 "Are any of my officials in the palace?" the king asked. Now Haman had just entered the courtyard; he had come to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows that was now ready.

Est 6:5 So the servants answered, "Haman is here, waiting to see you." "Show him in," said the king.

Est 6:6 So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "There is someone I wish very much to honor. What should I do for this man?" Haman thought to himself, "Now who could the king want to honor so much? Me, of course."

Est 6:7 (7-8) So he answered the king, "Have royal robes brought for this man—robes that you yourself wear. Have a royal ornament put on your own horse.

Est 6:9 Then have one of your highest noblemen dress the man in these robes and lead him, mounted on the horse, through the city square. Have the nobleman announce as they go: 'See how the king rewards someone he wishes to honor!' "

Est 6:10 Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry and get the robes and the horse, and provide these honors for Mordecai the Jew. Do everything for him that you have suggested. You will find him sitting at the entrance of the palace."

Est 6:11 So Haman got the robes and the horse, and he put the robes on Mordecai. Mordecai got on the horse, and Haman led him through the city square, announcing to the people as they went: "See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor!"

Est 6:12 Mordecai then went back to the palace entrance while Haman hurried home, covering his face in embarrassment.

Est 6:13 He told his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then she and those wise friends of his told him, "You are beginning to lose power to Mordecai. He is a Jew, and you cannot overcome him. He will certainly defeat you."

Esther Reveals Haman's Plot

Est 6:14 While they were still talking, the palace eunuchs arrived in a hurry to take Haman to Esther's banquet.

Esther 6:1-14

Esther 6 - Honor for Mordecai

A. The king's question.

1. (1-3) *A sleepless night.*

That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

a. **The king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles:** King Ahasuerus did what many do when they cannot sleep. He brought out a book and used it to fill the sleepless night, hoping that the reading will make him sleepy again.

i. "Ahasuerus is master of one hundred and twenty and seven provinces, but not master of ten minutes' sleep." (Spurgeon)

b. **And it was found written:** This was a remarkable example of Providence in action. King Ahasuerus cannot sleep, and he can choose 20 different diversions to fill his sleepless night – but he commands that a book be brought to him and read. The one commanded to bring the book could have brought any one book of the **records of the chronicles**, but he brought one particular book. The book could be opened to any page, but it was opened to the exact page telling the story of

Mordecai and how he saved the King from assassination. God guided every step along the way.

i. Even as king Ahasuerus had a **book of the records of the chronicles** (literally a *book of remembrance*), so God also has a book of remembrance: *Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.* (Mal 3:16)

c. **What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?** Showing rare concern for a common subject, King Ahasuerus considered a reward for Mordecai.

2. (4-5) *Haman in the courts of the king.*

So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had *just* entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. The king's servants said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in."

a. **Now Haman had just entered the outer court:** It was no *coincidence* that Haman entered the king's court at just that moment; it was no *coincidence* that Haman came at that moment to ask for the execution of Mordecai; it was no *coincidence* that king Ahasuerus wanted to honor Mordecai at just that moment.

b. **Haman is there, standing in the court:** If this Book of Esther shows us anything, it shows us that God manages the affairs of men, even without their knowledge. God knows what He is doing and in the courts of heaven there are no coincidences or surprises.

i. Esther wasn't *lucky* to be queen; Mordecai wasn't *lucky* to have overheard the assassination plot; it wasn't *luck* or *chance* that made Haman enter the royal courts at this time with this heart. All of these events were orchestrated by God and not by luck.

ii. This becomes difficult, of course, when *bad* things happen to us. It is easy to see God's management of all things when we see good things happen. But what about the bad? Even then, we must trust God's total plan, realizing that *all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28)*. We understand that Paul says *all things work together*; any one event, taken in isolation may seem to make no sense, but when we see all things working together we then see the ultimate wisdom of God's plan.

3. (6) *King Ahasuerus asks a question of Haman.*

So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"

a. **What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?** God arranged all things, so that not only will all the Jews be ultimately protected, but also so that both Mordecai and Haman would get what was coming to them.

b. **Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?** God often allows fallen man to set his own trap; allowing Haman to make his pride and arrogance be the cause of his ultimate humiliation.

4. (7-9) *Haman's answer on how the king should honor the man who pleases the king.*

And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'"

a. For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn: Haman, in his childish desire to be praised and honored by all, asked for things that really mattered very little, except to puff one up with pride.

b. Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor: Haman was a tragic man who can only believe he has done well when he heard applause. It is a good and sometimes appropriate thing to have applause here on earth, but it is tragic to live your life seeking for it. We should instead seek and be satisfied with the applause from heaven.

B. The king's command.

1. (10-11) Haman must lead the chorus of praise for Mordecai.

Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken." So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!"

a. **Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew:** It would have been something to see the face of Haman at that moment; to see that the king took his advice completely, but gave the honor to his arch enemy - the man that Haman came to ask for his execution.

b. **So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square:** The ultimate humiliation was for Haman to honor Mordecai in such a public way; humiliation is only really humiliation when it is *public*.

2. (12-14) *Mourning, warning, and a hasty departure to Esther's banquet.*

Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him." While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

a. **Mourning, and with his head covered:** This means that Haman acted as if someone dear to him had died. In fact, his pride had been dealt a death-blow.

b. **You will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him:** Haman's wife and his advisors could see the future well enough. Haman would not prevail against Mordecai, but Mordecai would prevail over Haman.

Est 7:1 And so the king and Haman went to eat with Esther

Est 7:2 for a second time. Over the wine the king asked her again, "Now, Queen Esther, what do you want? Tell me and you shall have it. I'll even give you half the empire."

Est 7:3 Queen Esther answered, "If it please Your Majesty to grant my humble request, my wish is that I may live and that my people may live.

Est 7:4 My people and I have been sold for slaughter. If it were nothing more serious than being sold into slavery, I would have kept quiet and not bothered you about it; but we are about to be destroyed—exterminated!"

Est 7:5 Then King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who dares to do such a thing? Where is this man?"

Est 7:6 Esther answered, "Our enemy, our persecutor, is this evil man Haman!" Haman faced the king and queen with terror.

Haman Is Hanged

Est 7:7 The king got up in a fury, left the room, and went outside to the palace gardens. Haman could see that the king was determined to punish him for this, so he stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Est 7:8 He had just thrown himself down on Esther's couch to beg for mercy, when the king came back into the room from the gardens. Seeing this, the king cried out, "Is this man going to rape the queen right here in front of me, in my own palace?" The king had no sooner said this than the eunuchs covered Haman's head.

Est 7:9 Then one of them, who was named Harbonah, said, "Haman even went so far as to build a gallows at his house so that he could hang Mordecai, who saved Your Majesty's life. And it's seventy-five feet tall!" "Hang Haman on it!" the king commanded.

Est 7:10 So Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. Then the king's anger cooled down.

Esther 7:1-10

Esther 7 - Haman's End

A. The second banquet.

1. (1-4) Esther finally makes her request: please spare my life!

So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What *is* your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss."

a. Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: Esther, even when she finally made her request, showed great tact. She did not immediately identify herself as a Jew, targeted for massacre - even as Haman also hid the identity of the group he targeted when he made his request (Est 3:8).

b. Let my life be given me at my petition: Esther also showed wisdom in how she framed her request. She appealed on a *personal* basis, knowing that she has never done anything but please the king.

2. (5) The king's reaction: who is this wicked man?

So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?”

a. **Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing:** Ahasuerus perhaps should have known that it was actually he himself who authorized such a plan. He was the one who gave authorization to Haman to carry out this plot (Est 3:10-11), though he did it in ignorance.

3. (6) Esther identifies the guilty party.

And Esther said, “The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman!” So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

a. **The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!** Esther exposed the truth about Haman – that he was not a faithful servant of the king, he was instead an **adversary and enemy**, more interested in his own fame and status than the benefit of the king.

b. **So Haman was terrified before the king and queen:** Haman never imagined that *Esther* was a Jew; now he stood before the king being rightly accused of plotting the murder of the king’s wife.

i. Now the wisdom of Esther’s strange request to invite Haman to these banquets can be seen; it maximized the impact upon both the king and upon Haman himself.

B. Haman’s wretched end.

1. (7-8) Haman’s doom is sealed.

Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine *and went* into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king.

When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I *am* in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

a. **Then the king arose in his wrath:** The king was filled with **wrath**; probably because he now realized that Haman had played him for a dupe in getting this decree to kill the Jews in effect.

b. **Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house:** For all of Haman's pleading, he only got himself into deeper trouble - now he was accused of personally assaulting Esther!

i. A Jewish writing says that the angel Gabriel pushed Haman, so he fell on Esther's couch just as king Ahasuerus was coming back into the room.

c. **They covered Haman's face:** Haman's head was covered as a preparation for execution.

2. (9-10) The execution of Haman.

Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

a. **Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high:** As in the case of the people executed in Est 2:23, Haman was probably not hanged with a rope around his neck; he was impaled on a huge stake in an ancient precursor of crucifixion.

b. **Which Haman made for Mordecai:** Haman found his end on the same instrument he had intended for the

death of Mordecai; he was caught in his own trap against Mordecai.

i. God often works this way and we should pray as the Psalmist did: *Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.* (Psa 7:14-16)

ii. Perhaps the greatest example of this was when Satan thought that he won by getting the crowd to crucify Jesus, but the cross turned out to be the instrument of his defeat.

c. **So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided:** The death of a substitute satisfied the **wrath** of the king. In the case of Mordecai and Haman, it was the guilty dying in the place of the innocent; in the case of us and Jesus, it is a matter of the innocent dying in the place of guilty.

Esther Saves the Jews

Est 8:1 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther all the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Esther told the king that Mordecai was related to her, and from then on Mordecai was allowed to enter the king's presence.

Est 8:2 The king took off his ring with his seal on it (which he had taken back from Haman) and gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property.

Est 8:3 Then Esther spoke to the king again, throwing herself at his feet and crying. She begged him to do something to stop the evil plot that Haman, the descendant of Agag, had made against the Jews.

Est 8:4 The king held out the gold scepter to her, so she stood up and said,

Est 8:5 "If it please Your Majesty, and if you care about me and if it seems right to you, please issue a proclamation to keep Haman's orders from being carried out—those orders that the son of Hammedatha the descendant of Agag gave for the destruction of all the Jews in the empire.

Est 8:6 How can I endure it if this disaster comes on my people, and my own relatives are killed?"

Est 8:7 King Xerxes then said to Queen Esther and Mordecai, the Jew, "Look, I have hanged Haman for his plot against the Jews, and I have given Esther his property.

Est 8:8 But a proclamation issued in the king's name and stamped with the royal seal cannot be revoked. You may, however, write to the Jews whatever you like; and you may write it in my name and stamp it with the royal seal."

Est 8:9 This happened on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. Mordecai called the king's secretaries and dictated letters to the Jews and to the governors, administrators, and officials of all the 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. The letters were written to each province in its own language and system of writing and to the Jews in their language and system of writing.

Est 8:10 Mordecai had the letters written in the name of King Xerxes, and he stamped them with the royal seal. They were delivered by riders mounted on fast horses from the royal stables.

Est 8:11 These letters explained that the king would allow the Jews in every city to organize for self-defense. If armed men of any nationality in any province attacked the Jewish men, their children, or their women, the Jews could fight back and destroy the attackers; they could slaughter them to the last man and take their possessions.

Est 8:12 This decree was to take effect throughout the Persian Empire on the day set for the slaughter of the Jews, the thirteenth of Adar, the twelfth month.

Est 8:13 It was to be proclaimed as law and made known to everyone in every province, so that the Jews would be ready to take revenge on their enemies when that day came.

Est 8:14 At the king's command the riders mounted royal horses and rode off at top speed. The decree was also made public in Susa, the capital city.

Est 8:15 Mordecai left the palace, wearing royal robes of blue and white, a cloak of fine purple linen, and a magnificent gold crown. Then the streets of Susa rang with cheers and joyful shouts.

Est 8:16 For the Jews there was joy and relief, happiness and a sense of victory.

Est 8:17 In every city and province, wherever the king's proclamation was read, the Jews held a joyful holiday with feasting and happiness. In fact, many other people became Jews, because they were afraid of them now.

Esther 8:1-17

Esther 8 - A Proclamation to Help the Jews

A. The appeal to the king.

1. (1-2) Haman's home is given to Esther; his position is given to Mordecai.

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he *was related* to her. So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

a. **On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman:** Haman, the disturbed man who had seemingly achieved everything, ended with nothing – nothing even to pass on to his family. One might say that he had climbed the ladder of success, but it was leaning against the wrong building.

b. **So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai:** Think of how hard Haman had to work to achieve all he did. Yet it was all for nothing; it was all a waste.

i. He should have lived his life after the conclusion of Solomon, who carefully considered these things: *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Ecc 12:13-14)*

2. (3-6) *Esther's request for the salvation of her people.*

Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing *seems* right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who *are* in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?"

a. **Implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had**

devised against the Jews: Esther asked that the previous decree requiring the extermination of the Jews be revoked.

b. Let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman: This was the request we might have expected to come back at Est 5:4, where Esther was first invited to make her request to king Ahasuerus. Yet God's wisdom operating in her life gave her the tact and ability to approach this great request in stages.

i. Even though Haman was defeated, the decree of the king still stood against the Jews. How could God's people be preserved when a decree of the king cannot be revoked (according to Est 1:19)?

3. (7-14) King Ahasuerus makes a counter-decree, allowing the Jews to protect themselves on the day they were scheduled for annihilation.

Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he *tried to* lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write *a decree* concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal *it* with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke." So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which *is* the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third *day*; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces *in all*, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed *it*

with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds. By these letters the king permitted the Jews who *were* in every city to gather together and protect their lives; to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, *both* little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

a. **You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please:** The king could not revoke the previous decree, so he simply made another decree giving support to the Jews against their attackers.

i. We might think of Haman as in the place of our enemy, Satan, and joyfully await the day God puts him away. But we still must deal with the righteous decree of God that demands our death: *The soul who sins shall die* (Eze 18:4). In our sins, we not only have an enemy (Satan), but we also have a legal decree from a righteous God against us.

i. God solves the problem, not by compromising His decree for eternal justice, but by fulfilling justice in taking the punishment we deserved - His counter-decree saves us; *that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus* (Rom 3:26).

b. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command:

There was an urgency to get the word out about this important decree of the king. Christians should show a similar urgency when it comes to being heralds of the decree that the justice of God has been satisfied for us in Jesus Christ.

B. Mordecai's advancement.

1. (15) Mordecai's promotion.

So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

a. So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel: God's purpose in all these matters goes farther than the sparing of the Jews from destruction; He also purposed to raise up Mordecai as the prime minister – as a replacement of Haman.

2. (16) Joy for the people of God.

The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor.

a. The Jews had light and gladness: This joy came *before* the actual day appointed when the Jews would be attacked, yet able to defend themselves. Nevertheless, because of the decree of the king, they can be assured of victory and rejoice in it ahead of time.

b. Light and gladness, joy and honor: In the same way, our course is not yet run; our salvation is not yet complete - yet we can rejoice, because of our confidence in our king - *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.* (Php 1:6)

3. (17) Salvation for the Gentiles.

And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

a. **Then many of the people of the land became Jews:** As they saw God working on behalf of His people, they wanted the same relationship with God.

The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

Est 9:1 The thirteenth day of Adar came, the day on which the royal proclamation was to take effect, the day when the enemies of the Jews were hoping to get them in their power. But instead, the Jews triumphed over them.

Est 9:2 In the Jewish quarter of every city in the empire the Jews organized to attack anyone who tried to harm them. People everywhere were afraid of them, and no one could stand against them.

Est 9:3 In fact, all the provincial officials—governors, administrators, and royal representatives—helped the Jews because they were all afraid of Mordecai.

Est 9:4 It was well-known throughout the empire that Mordecai was now a powerful man in the palace and was growing more powerful.

Est 9:5 So the Jews could do what they wanted with their enemies. They attacked them with swords and slaughtered them.

Est 9:6 In Susa, the capital city itself, the Jews killed five hundred people.

Est 9:7 (7-10) Among them were the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews: Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. However, there was no looting.

Est 9:11 That same day the number of people killed in Susa was reported to the king.

Est 9:12 He then said to Queen Esther, "In Susa alone the Jews have killed five hundred people, including Haman's ten sons. What must they have done out in the provinces! What do you want now? You shall have it. Tell me what else you want, and you shall have it."

Est 9:13 Esther answered, "If it please Your Majesty, let the Jews in Susa do again tomorrow what they were allowed to do today. And have the bodies of Haman's ten sons hung from the gallows."

Est 9:14 The king ordered this to be done, and the proclamation was issued in Susa. The bodies of Haman's ten sons were publicly displayed.

Est 9:15 On the fourteenth day of Adar the Jews of Susa got together again and killed three hundred more people in the city. But again, they did no looting.

Est 9:16 The Jews in the provinces also organized and defended themselves. They rid themselves of their enemies by killing seventy-five thousand people who hated them. But they did no looting.

Est 9:17 This was on the thirteenth day of Adar. On the next day, the fourteenth, there was no more killing, and they made it a joyful day of feasting.

Est 9:18 The Jews of Susa, however, made the fifteenth a holiday, since they had slaughtered their enemies on the thirteenth and fourteenth and then stopped on the fifteenth.

Est 9:19 This is why Jews who live in small towns observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a joyous holiday, a time for feasting and giving gifts of food to one another.

The Feast of Purim Inaugurated

Est 9:20 Mordecai had these events written down and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, throughout the Persian Empire,

Est 9:21 telling them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as holidays every year.

Est 9:22 These were the days on which the Jews had rid themselves of their enemies; this was a month that had been turned from a time of grief and despair into a time of joy and happiness. They were told to observe these days with feasts and parties, giving gifts of food to one another and to the poor.

Est 9:23 So the Jews followed Mordecai's instructions, and the celebration became an annual custom.

Est 9:24 Haman son of Hammedatha—the descendant of Agag and the enemy of the Jewish people—had cast lots ("purim," they were called) to determine the day for destroying the Jews; he had planned to wipe them out.

Est 9:25 But Esther went to the king, and the king issued written orders with the result that Haman suffered the fate he had planned for the Jews—he and his sons were hanged from the gallows.

Est 9:26 That is why the holidays are called Purim. Because of Mordecai's letter and because of all that had happened to them,

Est 9:27 the Jews made it a rule for themselves, their descendants, and anyone who might become a Jew, that at the proper time each year these two days would be regularly observed according to Mordecai's instructions.

Est 9:28 It was resolved that every Jewish family of every future generation in every province and every city should remember and observe the days of Purim for all time to come.

Est 9:29 Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai, also wrote a letter, putting her full authority

behind the letter about Purim, which Mordecai had written earlier.

Est 9:30 The letter was addressed to all the Jews, and copies were sent to all the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. It wished the Jews peace and security

Est 9:31 and directed them and their descendants to observe the days of Purim at the proper time, just as they had adopted rules for the observance of fasts and times of mourning. This was commanded by both Mordecai and Queen Esther.

Est 9:32 Esther's command, confirming the rules for Purim, was written down on a scroll.

Esther 9:1-32

Esther 9 - Victory for the Jews

A. They defeat their enemies.

1. (1-5) Victory, with the help of the king.

Now in the twelfth month, that *is*, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, *the time* came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai *was* great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies

with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them.

a. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred:

The Jews definitely had their enemies, those who wished to destroy them. Yet they had someone great on their side: the king, with all his resources. With the king for them, it didn't matter who was against them.

b. Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies: We have our own enemies to deal with; but with the King of Kings on our side, we have no reason to fear - *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31)*

2. (6-10) Cities where they fought their enemies.

And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha; the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews; they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

3. (11-17) At the king's invitation, Esther asks for the complete defeat of all the enemies of the Jews.

On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what *is* your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what *is* your further request? It shall be done." Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews

who *are* in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons. And the Jews who *were* in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. *This was* on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth day of *the month* they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

a. **If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows:** Many have criticized Esther for this, saying it showed a lack of love towards her enemies. Yet she displays the same principle found so often in Joshua – she would not settle for less than total victory.

b. **And they hanged Haman's ten sons:** Haman and his sons were descendents of the ancient Amalekites (comparing Est 3:1 and 1Sa 15:8-33). God commanded Saul, the son of Kish, to execute the full extent of God's judgment against the Amalekites (1Sa 15:2-3). Saul failed; but this later descendent of the tribe of Benjamin and a son of Kish named Mordecai (Est 2:5-6) completed God's judgment against the Amalekites.

i. "Now it was God's intent that a last conflict should take place between Israel and Amalek: the conflict

which began with Joshua in the desert was to be finished by Mordecai in the king's palace." (Spurgeon)

B. The feast of Purim established.

1. (18-19) A great celebration among the Jews of the Persian Empire.

But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth *day*, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of *the month* they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwall'd towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar *with* gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

2. (20-32) The institution of the feast of Purim.

And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (*that is*, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; but when *Esther* came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which *Haman* had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. So they called

these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written *instructions* and according to the *prescribed* time, *that* these days *should be* remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail *to be observed* among the Jews, and *that* the memory of them should not perish among their descendants. Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And *Mordecai* sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, *with* words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim at their *appointed* time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

a. **Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly:** The principle of remembering God's great deliverance is good; we too often forget His great works.

b. **So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim:** Today, Purim is one of the more popular Jewish feasts, with costumes, games and noise.

The Greatness of Mordecai

Est 10:1 King Xerxes imposed forced labor on the people of the coastal regions of his empire as well as on those of the interior.

Est 10:2 All the great and wonderful things he did, as well as the whole story of how he promoted Mordecai to high office, are recorded in the official records of the kings of Persia and Media.

Est 10:3 Mordecai the Jew was second in rank only to King Xerxes himself. He was honored and well-liked by his fellow Jews. He worked for the good of his people and for the security of all their descendants.

Esther 10:1-3

Esther 10 - Mordecai's Promotion

A. Epilogue.

1. (1-2) The glory of the reign of King Ahasuerus.

And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

2. (3) Mordecai is promoted to the position of second in the kingdom.

For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

B. Observations on the Book of Esther.

1. The Book of Esther shows how the hand of God can move in a supernaturally-natural way.

a. "It has been well said that the Book of Esther is a record of wonders without a miracle, and therefore, though equally revealing the glory of the Lord, it sets it forth in another fashion from that which is displayed in the overthrow of Pharaoh by miraculous power." (Spurgeon)

b. Think of all that God arranged in the story of Esther:

- God arranged for the noble Queen Vashti to lose her place.
- God arranged for a competition to replace Queen Vashti.
- God arranged for Esther to enter the competition.
- God arranged special favor for Esther among the other women.
- God arranged for Mordecai to have access to both Esther and the affairs of the kingdom.
- God arranged the lot that was cast to give 11 months warning before the evil event (Est 3:12-13).
- God arranged that the decree command that the Jews be killed by private hands, instead of by the army of Persia – which would have been much more difficult to stop.
- God arranged that Haman restrain his anger and not kill Mordecai immediately (Est 5:10).
- God arranged for Esther to delay her request; first asking for a banquet with the king and then *another* banquet.
- God arranged for Haman's anger to come to a peak on one particular day.
- God arranged for Ahasuerus to have a sleepless night.

- God arranged for Ahasuerus to pick up a certain book in his sleepless night.
- God arranged for Ahasuerus to read the passage about Mordecai in that particular book.

2. God's hand in history never rules out our actions. The actions of Esther and Mordecai were critical to the preservation of the people of God.

a. God's will is accomplished, and yet men are perfectly free agents; Haman did as he pleased, Ahasuerus did what he wanted, so did Mordecai and Esther. We see no interference, no coercion - they all do their will, and bear full responsibility, yet God works out His eternal plan for the ages through it all.

b. "There it is; man is a free agent in what he does, responsible for his actions, and verily guilty when he does wrong, and he will be justly punished too, and if he be lost the blame will rest with himself alone: but yet there is One who ruleth over all, who, without complicity in their sin, makes even the actions of wicked men to subserve his holy and righteous purposes. Believe these two truths and you will see them in practical agreement in daily life, though you will not be able to devise a theory for harmonizing them on paper." (Spurgeon)

3. God, in His wise and Providential plan, allows His people to be tested – sometimes severely so. We must not suppose that the servants of God will be protected from every trial, because the trials are part of God's design.

- It was a great trial for Mordecai; he refused to bow to Haman and *others* would suffer for his refusal to pay homage to Haman.
- It was a great trial for Esther; she heard the news of the coming slaughter of her people and had to boldly approach the king to make an appeal.

4. *"Last of all, let each child of God rejoice that we have a guardian so near the throne. Every Jew in Shushan must have felt hope when he remembered that the queen was a Jewess. To-day let us be glad that Jesus is exalted."*
(Spurgeon)